

Journal Topics, April 25, 2008

At the 11th hour, after much frustration and lobbying of Gov. Rod Blagojevich's administration, the Glenview Park District awarded a \$4,302,776 bid to V3 Construction Company of Woodridge for improvements at Community Park West.

Work could start as early as next week.

The state awarded a \$400,000 Open Space Lands Acquisition and Development (OSLAD) grant to the park district last Thursday (Apr. 24) hours before a park board meeting when the bid award had to be considered.

Local state legislators, park district officials and village officials said they appreciated the grant but blasted the Blagojevich administration for dragging its feet, leaving them in the dark and allowing infighting to color their judgement.

Had the park district awarded the bid they would have forfeited the grant. Had it not, the park district would have lost the upcoming planting season.

Before the funds were released, officials from Blagojevich's office said the grants were held up by Blagojevich's administration because of a \$750 million gap in the state budget.

Park District Executive Director Chuck Balling, state legislators and Village President Kerry Cummings said the funds are not part of the state's general revenue fund and should not have been held hostage to the infighting that has created a very difficult environment in Springfield.

Local leaders worked hard to pressure the Blagojevich administration to just give them some information or a waiver of the bidding rules.

Balling appeared before a joint state agriculture and revenue committee hearing recently to plead the park district's case.

Cummings said she cornered Blagojevich at a luncheon he hosted on Wednesday, Apr. 16 in Chicago and personally placed a letter from Balling in the governor's hand.

Cummings said when she asked about the grants, Blagojevich began asking her who her legislators were and said they needed to pressure House Speaker Michael Madigan to pass the Capital Bill.

"All this infighting has to stop," said Cummings. "They put real (federal) dollars in jeopardy."

Cummings said infighting in Springfield might give leaders in Congress the impression that money sent to Illinois would not be used effectively. She said U.S. representatives Melissa Bean (D-8th) and Mark Kirk (R-10th) are working together to pressure state leaders to stop their fighting.

Balling and state legislators echoed Cummings' sentiments.

Though Balling celebrated the receipt of the grant, he said the atmosphere in Springfield had become "toxic."

"It is so unnecessary to go through weeks of turmoil to find something that's just standard procedure," said State Sen. Susan Garrett (D-29th). "Why do they do this, what's the point?"

State Rep. Elaine Nekritz (D-57th) said that what is needed is "greater predictability and transparency" in how the governor's office deals with these grants.

Balling credited Garrett, Nekritz, State Rep. Elizabeth Coulson (R-17th), State Sen. Jeff Schoenberg (D-9th) and State Sen. Terry Link (D-30th) along with Cummings and park district staff for their work procuring the grants.

A spokeswoman for Blagojevich said she was looking into the matter but did not have comment by press time.